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Kingsley, Darwin Pearl

“A knock at the door”

[New York]

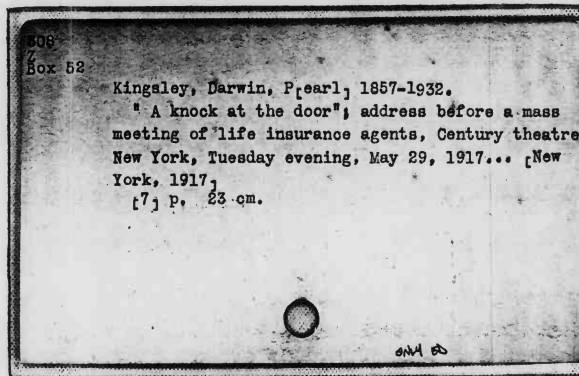
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1307
JUN 8 - 1917

Gift of the President

Gift of the President

"A KNOCK AT THE DOOR"

ADDRESS BEFORE A MASS MEETING
OF LIFE INSURANCE AGENTS
CENTURY THEATRE, NEW YORK
TUESDAY EVENING, MAY 29, 1917

BY

DARWIN P. KINGSLEY

"I approve most heartily your suggestion that
"the life insurance agents devote one or two
"days to the sole work of placing Liberty
"Bonds. * * * *

W. G. McADOO, Secretary"

to Life Underwriters

308
2
Box 52

Before Rhode Island entered the Federal Union it had existed as a civic entity for 137 years under a charter granted to Roger Williams. That instrument was so liberal and advanced in its theories of human rights, so entirely in harmony with the doctrines of the great charter of 1787 that when the State entered the Union no change in its already ancient fundamental law was necessary.

Roger Williams was one of freedom's great prophets; yet because of his theories of individual liberty and of government he was persecuted and banished from Massachusetts Bay where freedom is supposed to have been cradled.

When our Federal Constitution was written men began to understand that Roger Williams was an earlier if not a greater prophet than Thomas Jefferson. He had prepared the way.

We are now at war. We are at war for reasons so unselfish that the average citizen needs to be quickened, to be quickened morally and mentally in order to react to the standards which the nation has set up under the leadership of Woodrow Wilson.

In the labor of that quickening what group of our citizens is most certainly, most completely equipped for service? Who have prepared the way? Who can best preach this relatively new gospel? the gospel of war without hate or desire of conquest or indemnities or material gain? the gospel of war not for peace first but for justice first? What men by training, by conviction, by the principles which they have advocated, have taught the world constantly and mightily the truths for the wider establishment of which we as a nation are now about to fight: individual responsibility and sovereignty, liberty with justice, the economic power of co-operation and the supreme value of all human life? Who have labored to erect certain great peaceful fabrics of faith and credit and values which have become in effect International Republics limited by no savage frontiers? Who have labored successfully in the development of world-wide enterprises which long since foreshadowed the post-bellum dream of universal justice and permanent peace?

BEFORE WE AS A PEOPLE UNDERTOOK TO MAKE THE WORLD SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY, WHO HAD ALREADY LONG LABORED TO MAKE IT SAFE FOR THE DEFENCELESS?

To all these queries one answer:

You and thousands of others like you who carry the Rate Book—the Bible of true democracy and of sound economics. You have had this equipment, you have preached these doctrines, and you have done these things.

Your business is teaching men—individuals—to do their duty. You constantly fight the natural inertia of selfishness. Men know that all must die, but most men think that the other fellow will be the one to go. Endowed with good health, busy at his appointed work, death seems far off and no man likes even to discuss it. "Why worry? Why surrender time or money as against a contingency that of course threatens others but not me?" is about the train of thought of the average man.

There is a striking similarity between this mental attitude and the attitude of the American people toward war,—toward this war. "Why should we worry? We are protected against invasions by two great oceans. We love peace and hate war. We want no other people's territory. We have no designs on other people's rights. War may come to others; it may come to us some time but not now." That fairly expressed our feelings up to April 2, 1917.

Then something happened. Just as there comes a day to every man when he realizes that death is for him as well as for his brother, so on the second of April we—some of us at least—realized that war meant no longer to make favorites of us but in its hideous activities would thereafter have no regard for our high professions and love of peace. But not all of us understood that instantly. Some do not grasp the truth now.

Your ordinary work as life insurance men is rendered very easy when your prospect has squarely confronted his duty, when he has either mentally worked the problem out under your tutelage or has been shocked by some physical circumstance into a realization of his individual weakness. Then he responds. Then he gets ready.

The nobility of your work day by day, in the undramatic times of peace, lies in this: You persuade men to think when the natural tendency is not to think. You persuade them to face duty—when the call of duty is uncomfortable, when it seems

indeed almost an abstraction. You persuade them to prepare for loss and to make sacrifices in that preparation when no sense of danger lives in their consciousness. You labor to make men a little bigger, a little more unselfish, a little more heroic, a little more rational, a little less provincial and a little more God-like than the average man naturally is. Who attempts daily a more difficult or a nobler task? What other training so perfectly equips men for the labor that confronts us all to-night, as patriots? This particular call of the nation finds you so ready that you have only substantially to go on doing your usual work. The charter which controls your activities needs no change.

The day has come when America—generous but self-centered, idealistic but intensely practical, peace-loving and war-hating—must be shaken from her lethargy, must be taught that in this little world rivers of human blood cannot flow without draining her veins also.

There is nothing the matter with the patriotism of our people; they have lost none of their idealism, none of their love of liberty—just as there is nothing the matter with the individual man's love of his family. Your task as life insurance men with the individual, is to make him appreciate the obvious; your task as patriots with the nation, is exactly the same. The first task ought to be easy, but we know that it is not; the second task must be performed however difficult it may be.

On the 5th and 6th of June you and your fellows will sell Liberty Loan Bonds exclusively (I hope you'll sell them incidentally every day)—bonds which rest on the faith of a free and mighty people. Why does the Government sell these pledges? Because it believes and on our behalf has declared that the natural, the inalienable rights of humanity are desperately assailed and that even our own liberties are imperilled. Unless the people can be made to see that, they will not buy these bonds. Until a man has been shocked into an appreciation of his inability to carry the risk of his own mortality you can't insure his life. Until a peace-loving nation has been shaken out of its natural lethargy it is difficult to make it understand that a given condition is a deadly menace, when that condition is physically a long way off.

Later on many of you may take your places under the flag in the trenches or on the sea. Once the nation is aroused there can be but one result. These, however, are the days of hesitation. It all seems so horrible, so impossible. To arouse our people Paul Revere must again go thundering through the country—

side. Signals of great danger have been flashed to us from the watch tower as they were to him, and there must be riders or the people will not be awake and ready. And what do the signals tell? They tell that a great nation drunk with power has fore-sworn itself; that the Lusitania has been sunk in such violation of every natural impulse of civilized men; that it is clearly a case of conscious barbarism; that Edith Cavell had been shot; that Belgium has been outraged again and again; that the young womanhood of Northern France has been debauched by savages more ruthless than the Huns; that a power is raging through the land and lurking under-sea as sharks lurk, in order to strike as sharks strike, a power which jeers at the principles of our Declaration of Independence and mocks at government by the people. If the true significance of those danger signals can be driven home, there will be no trouble about the bonds nor about the other billions yet to come; but on June 5th and 6th Paul Revere must ride again; there must come to every home in the Nation as there came to every home in Concord and Lexington on that April morning in 1775:

"A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
"And a word that shall echo forevermore."

On June 5th and 6th you will ride to help quicken the patriotism, the idealism of the nation. You are already organized; you are veterans in a like service; you know what the signals mean and you know your duty. You can qualify in this fight for Liberty as completely as Rhode Island did under Roger Williams's charter. You will thereby help to win from the people assent to the high and unselfish purpose which has made our Government denounce and attack this Prussian monster.

During our Civil War—the wounds of which are now happily healed—the plain people—always more or less mute—expressed their loyalty to their great weary Leader in the White House through song. In one of these songs they said:

"We are coming Father Abraham."

The message so sent reached Lincoln and he was cheered and strengthened by it.

The masses are mute to-day. They have no medium through which to express to our war-worn Allies their wonder, their admiration, their affection, and their devotion. By your work on these appointed days you will help to give these emotions a

voice: a voice which will daily rise in volume and power, a voice which when full-throated will sound round the earth bringing hope and courage to all lovers of liberty, a voice which shall say to our comrades over the sea:

"We are coming O! glorious sister, France!

"We are coming O! great Mother England!

"Coming because Liberty is assailed and we have not
"forgotten that our fathers did not fear death, for liberty's
"sake.

"Coming because we have highly resolved anew that government
"of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not
"perish from the earth."

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